# Islam


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## Introduction

Islam is a Semitic religion, which has over one billion adherents all over the world. Islam means "submission to the will of God". Muslims accept the Qur’an, as the word of God revealed to His last and final prophet, Mohammed (peace be upon him). Islam states that Allah sent messengers and prophets throughout the ages with the message of Oneness of God, and accountability in the Hereafter. Islam thus makes it an article of faith to believe in all the earlier prophets, starting with Adam, and continuing with Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, John and Jesus amongst many others (may peace be on them all).

## Concept of God in Islam

### The Most Concise Definition of God:

The most concise definition of God in Islam is given in the four verses of Surah Ikhlas which is Chapter 112 of the Qur’an:

"Say: He is Allah, the One and Only. "Allah, the Eternal, Absolute. "He begets not, nor is He begotten. And there is none like unto Him." [Al-Qur’an 112:1-4]

The word ‘*Assamad*’ is difficult to translate. It means ‘absolute existence’, which can be attributed only to Allah (swt), all other existence being temporal or conditional. It also means that Allah (swt) is not dependant on any person or thing, but all persons and things are dependant on Him.

## Surah Ikhlas - the touchstone of theology:

Surah Ikhlas (Chapter 112) of the Glorious Qur'an, is the touchstone of theology. '*Theo*' in Greek means God and '*logy*' means study. Thus Theology means study of God and to Muslims this four line definition of Almighty God serves as the touchstone of the study of God. Any candidate to divinity must be subjected to this 'acid test'. Since the attributes of Allah given in this chapter are unique, false gods and pretenders to divinity can be easily dismissed using these verses.

## What does Islam say about 'god-men'?

India is often called the land of 'god-men'. This is due to the abundance of so-called spiritual masters in India. Many of these 'babas' and 'saints' have a large following in many countries. Islam abhors deification of any human being. To understand the Islamic stand towards such pretenders to divinity, let us analyze one such 'god-man', Osho Rajneesh.

Let us put this candidate, 'Bhagwan' Rajneesh, to the test of Surah Ikhlas, the touchstone of theology:

i) The first criterion is "Say, He is Allah, one and only". Is Rajneesh one and only? No! Rajneesh was one among the multitude of 'spiritual teachers' produced by India. Some disciples of Rajneesh might still hold that Rajneesh is one and only.

ii) The second criterion is, 'Allah is absolute and eternal'. We know from Rajneesh's biography that he was suffering from diabetes, asthma, and chronic backache. He alleged that the U.S. Government gave him slow poison in prison. Imagine Almighty God being poisoned! Rajneesh was thus, neither absolute nor eternal.

iii) The third criterion is 'He begets not, nor is He begotten'. We know that Rajneesh was born in Jabalpur in India and had a mother as well as a father who later became his disciples.

In May 1981 he went to U.S.A. and established a town called 'Rajneeshpuram'. He later fell foul of the West and was finally arrested and asked to leave the country. He came back to India and started a commune in Pune which is now known as the 'Osho' commune. He died in 1990. The followers of Osho Rajneesh believe that he is Almighty God. At the 'Osho commune' in Pune one can find the following epitaph on his tombstone:

"Osho – never born, never died; only visited the planet Earth between 11th December 1931 to 19th January 1990."

They forget to mention that he was not granted visa for 21 countries of the world. Can a person ever imagine 'God' visiting the earth, and requiring a visa to enter a country! The Archbishop of Greece said that if Rajneesh had not been deported, they would have burnt his house and those of his disciples.

(iv) The fourth test, which is the most stringent is, "There is none like unto Him". The moment you can imagine or compare 'God' to anything, then he (the candidate to divinity) is not God. It is not possible to conjure up a mental picture of the One True God. We know that Rajneesh was a human being, having two eyes, two ears, a nose, a mouth and a white flowing beard. Photographs and posters of Rajneesh are available in plenty. The moment you can imagine or draw a mental picture of an entity, then that entity is not God.

Many are tempted to make anthropomorphic comparisons of God. Take for instance, Arnold Schwarzenegger, the famous body builder and Hollywood actor, who won the title of 'Mr. Universe', the strongest man in the world. Let us suppose that someone says that Almighty God is a thousand times stronger than Arnold Schwarzenegger. The moment you can compare any entity to God, whether the comparison is to Schwarzenegger or to King Kong, whether it is a thousand times or a million times stronger, it fails the Qur'anic criterion, "There is none like unto Him".

Thus, the ‘acid test’ cannot be passed by anyone except the One True God.

The following verse of the Glorious Qur’an conveys a similar message:

"No vision can grasp Him but His grasp is over all vision: He is above all comprehension, Yet is acquainted with all things." [Al-Qur’an 6:103]

## By what name do we call God?

The Muslims prefer calling the Supreme Creator, Allah, instead of by the English word ‘God’. The Arabic word, ‘Allah’, is pure and unique, unlike the English word ‘God’, which can be played around with.

If you add ‘s’ to the word God, it becomes ‘Gods’, that is the plural of God. Allah is one and singular, there is no plural of Allah. If you add ‘dess’ to the word God, it becomes ‘Goddess’ that is a female God. There is nothing like male Allah or female Allah. Allah has no gender. If you add the word ‘father’ to ‘God’ it becomes ‘God-father’. God-father means someone who is a guardian. There is no word like ‘*Allah-Abba*’ or ‘Allah-father’. If you add the word ‘mother’ to ‘God’, it becomes ‘God-mother’. There is nothing like ‘*Allah-Ammi*’, or ‘Allah-mother’ in Islam. Allah is a unique word. If you prefix tin before the word God, it becomes tin-God i.e., fake God. Allah is a unique word, which does not conjure up any mental picture nor can it be played around with. Therefore the Muslims prefer using the Arabic word ‘Allah’ for the Almighty. Sometimes, however, while speaking to the non-Muslims we may have to use the inappropriate word God, for Allah. Since the intended audience of this article is general in nature, consisting of both Muslims as well as non-Muslims, I have used the word God instead of Allah in several places in this article.

## God does not become a human being:

Some may argue that God does not become a human being but only takes a human form. If God only takes a human form but does not become a human being, He should not possess any human qualities. We know that all the ‘God-men’, have human qualities and failings. They have all the human needs such as the need to eat, sleep, etc.

The worship of God in human form is therefore a logical fallacy and should be abhorred in all its forms and manifestations.

That is the reason why the Qur’an speaks against all forms of anthropomorphism. The Glorious Qur’an says in the following verse:

"There is nothing whatever like unto Him." [Al-Qur’an 42:11]

## God does not perform ungodly acts:

The attributes of Almighty God preclude any evil since God is the source of justice, mercy and truth. God can never be thought of as doing an ungodly act. Hence we cannot imagine God telling a lie, being unjust, making a mistake, forgetting things, or having any such human failings. Similarly God can do injustice if He chooses to, but He will never do it because being unjust is an ungodly act.

The Qur’an says: "Allah is never unjust In the least degree." [Al-Qur’an 4:40]

God can be unjust if He chooses to be so, but the moment God does injustice, He ceases to be God.

## God does not make mistakes:

God can make mistakes if He wants to, but He does not make mistakes because making a mistake is an ungodly act. The Qur'an says:

"…my Lord never errs." [Holy Qur'an 20:52]

The moment God makes a mistake, he ceases to be God.

## God does not forget:

God can forget if He wants to. But God does not forget anything because forgetting is an ungodly act, which reeks of human limitations and failings. The Qur'an says:

"…my Lord never errs, nor forgets." [Al-Qur'an 20:52]

## God only performs Godly acts:

The Islamic concept of God is that God has power over all things. The Qur'an says in several places (Al -Qur'an 2:106; 2:109; 2:284; 3:29; 16:77; and 35:1):
"For verily Allah has power over all things"

Further, the Glorious Qur'an says:
"Allah is the doer of all that He intends." [Al-Qur'an 85:16]

We must keep in mind that Allah intends only Godly acts and not ungodly acts.

## Philosophy of Anthropomorphism:

Many religions at some point believe, directly or indirectly, in the philosophy of anthropomorphism i.e. God becoming a human. Their contention is that Almighty God is so pure and holy that He is unaware of the hardships, shortcomings and feelings of human beings. In order to set the rules for human beings, He came down to earth as a human. This deceptive logic has fooled countless millions through the ages. Let us now analyze this argument and see if it stands to reason.

## The Creator prepares the instruction manual:

Suppose I manufacture a video cassette recorder (VCR). Do I have to become a VCR to know what is good or what is bad for the VCR? What do I do? I write an instruction manual: "In order to watch a video cassette, insert the cassette and press the play button. In order to stop, press the stop button. If you want to fast forward press the FF button. Do not drop it from a height or it will get damaged. Do not immerse it in water or it will get spoilt". I write an instruction manual that lists the various do's and don'ts for the machine.

## Holy Qur'an is the instruction manual for the human being:

Similarly, our Lord and Creator Allah (swt) need not take human form to know what is good or bad for the human being. He chooses to reveal the instruction manual. The last and final instruction manual of the human beings is the Glorious Qur'an. The 'dos' and 'don'ts' for the human beings are mentioned in the Qur'an.
If you allow me to compare human beings with machines, I would say humans are more complicated than the most complex machines in the world. Even the most advanced computers, which are extremely complex, are pale in comparison to the myriad physical, psychological, genetic and social factors that affect individual and collective human life.

The more advanced the machine, greater is the need for its instruction manual. By the same logic, don't human beings require an instruction manual by which to govern their own lives?

## Allah chooses Messengers:

Allah (swt) need not come down personally for giving the instruction manual. He chooses a man amongst men to deliver the message and communicates with him at a higher level through the medium of revelations. Such chosen men are called messengers and prophets of God.

## Some people are 'blind' and 'deaf':

Despite the absurdity of the philosophy of anthropomorphism, followers of many religions believe in and preach it to others. Is it not an insult to human intelligence and to the Creator who gave us this intelligence? Such people are truly 'deaf' and 'blind' despite the faculty of hearing and sight given to them by Allah. The Qur'an says:
"Deaf, dumb, and blind, They will not return (to the path)." [Al-Qur'an 2:18]

The Bible gives a similar message in the Gospel of Matthew: "Seeing they see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand." [The Bible, Matthew 13:13]

A similar message is also given in the Hindu Scriptures in the Rigveda.

"There maybe someone who sees the words and yet indeed does not see them; may be another one who hears these words but indeed does not hear them." [Rigveda 10:71:4]

All these scriptures are telling their readers that though the things are made so clear yet many people divert away from the truth.

## Attributes of God:

1. **To Allah belong the most beautiful names:**

   The Qur'an says: "Say: call upon Allah, or call upon Rahman, by whatever name you call upon Him, (it is well), for to Him belong the most beautiful names." [Al-Qur'an 17:110]

   A similar message regarding the beautiful names of Allah (swt) is repeated in the Qur'an in Surah Al-A'raf (7:180), in Surah Taha (20:8) and in Surah Al-Hashr (59:24)

   The Qur'an gives no less than ninety-nine different attributes to Almighty Allah. The Qur'an refers to Allah as *Ar-Rahman* (Most Gracious), Ar-Raheem (Most Merciful) and *Al-Hakeem* (All Wise) among many other names. You can call Allah by any name but that name should be beautiful and should not conjure up a mental picture.

2. **Each attribute of God is unique and possessed by Him alone:**
   Not only does God possess unique attributes, but also each attribute of Almighty God is sufficient to identify Him. I shall clarify this point in detail. Let us take an example of a famous personality, say Neil Armstrong. Neil Armstrong is an astronaut. The attribute of being an astronaut possessed by Neil Armstrong is correct but not unique to Neil Armstrong alone. So when one asks, who is an astronaut? The answer is, there are hundreds of people in the world who are astronauts. Neil Armstrong is an American. The attribute of being American possessed by Neil Armstrong is correct but not sufficient to identify him. So when one asks, who is an American? The answer is, there are millions of people who are American. To identify the person uniquely we must look for a unique attribute possessed by none except that person. For example, Neil Armstrong was the first human to set foot on the moon. So when one asks, who was the first man to set foot on the moon, the answer is only one, i.e. Neil Armstrong. Similarly the attribute of Almighty God should be unique. If I say God is the constructor of buildings, it is possible and true, but it is not unique. Thousands of people can construct a building. But each

attribute of Allah is unique and points to none but Allah. For example, God is the creator of the universe. If someone asks who is the creator of the universe, the answer is only one, i.e. Almighty God is the Ultimate Creator. Similarly, following are some of the many unique attributes possessed by none other than the Creator of the universe, Almighty Allah:

"*Ar-Raheem*", **the Most Merciful**
"*Ar-Rahman*", **the Most Gracious**
"*Al-Hakeem*", **the Most Wise**

So when one asks, "Who is '*Ar-Raheem'*, (the Most Merciful)?", there can only be one answer: "Almighty Allah".

3. **One attribute of God should not contradict with other attributes:**

   Besides the attribute being unique, it should not contradict other attributes. To continue with the earlier example, suppose somebody says that Neil Armstrong is an American astronaut who was the first human to set foot on the moon and was an Indian. The attribute possessed by Neil Armstrong of being the first man to set foot on the moon, is correct. But its associated quality of being an Indian, is false. Similarly if someone says that God is the Creator of the Universe and has one head, two hands, two feet, etc., the attribute (Creator of the Universe) is correct but the associated quality (in the form of human being) is wrong and false.

4. **All attributes should point to the one and same God:**

   Since there is only one God, all the attributes should point to one and the same God. To say that Neil Armstrong was an American astronaut who first set foot on the moon, but he was born in 1971 is wrong. Both these unique qualities belong to one and the same person, i.e. Neil Armstrong. Similarly to say that the Creator of the universe is one God and the Cherisher is another God is absurd because God possesses all these attributes combined together.

## Unity of God:

Some polytheists argue by saying that the existence of more than one God is not illogical. Let us point out to them that if there were more than one God, they would dispute with one another, each god trying to fulfill his will against the will of the other gods. This can be seen in the mythology of the polytheistic and pantheistic religions. If a 'God' is defeated or unable to defeat the others, he is surely not the one true God. Also popular among polytheistic religions is the idea of many Gods, each having different responsibilities. Each one would be responsible for a part of man's existence e.g. a Sun-God, a Rain-God, etc. This indicates that one 'God' is incompetent of certain acts and moreover he is also ignorant of the other Gods' powers, duties, functions and responsibilities. There cannot be an ignorant and incapable God. If there were more than one God it would surely lead to confusion, disorder, chaos and destruction in the universe. But the universe is in complete harmony. The Glorious Qur'an says:

"If there were, in the heavens and the earth, other gods besides Allah, there would have been confusion in both! But glory to Allah, The Lord of the Throne, (High is He) above what they attribute to Him!" [Al-Qur'an 21:22]

If there were more than one God, they would have taken away what they created. The Qur'an says:

"No son did Allah beget, nor is there any god along with Him: (if there were many gods), behold, each god would have taken away what he had created, and some would have lorded it over others! Glory to Allah! (He is free) from the (sort of) things they attribute to Him!" [Al-Qur'an 23:91]

Thus the existence of one True, Unique, Supreme, Almighty God, is the only logical concept of God.

## TAWHEED:

**Definition and Categories:**

Islam believes in 'Tawheed' which is not merely monotheism i.e. belief in one God, but much more. Tawheed literally means 'unification' i.e. 'asserting oneness' and is derived from the Arabic verb 'Wahhada' which means to unite, unify or consolidate.

Tawheed can be divided into three categories.

1. Tawheed ar-Ruboobeeyah
2. Tawheed al-Asmaa-was-Sifaat
3. Tawheed al-Ibaadah.

1. ***Tawheed ar-Ruboobeeyah* (maintaining the unity of Lordship)**

   The first category is '*Tawheed ar-Ruboobeeyah'*. '*Ruboobeeyah'* is derived from the root verb "*Rabb*" meaning Lord, Sustainer and Cherisher.

   Therefore '*Tawheed-ar-Ruboobeeyah*' means maintaining the unity of Lordship. This category is based on the fundamental concept that Allah (swt) alone caused all things to exist when there was nothing. He created or originated all that exists out of nothing. He alone is the sole Creator, Cherisher, and Sustainer of the complete universe and all between it, without any need from it or for it.

2. **Tawheed al-Asmaa was-Sifaat (maintaining the unity of Allah's name and attributes):**

   The second category is 'Tawheed al Asmaa was Sifaat' which means maintaining the unity of Allah's name and attributes. This category is divided into five aspects:

   a. **Allah should be referred to as described by Him and His Prophet**

      Allah must be referred to according to the manner in which He and His prophet have described Him without explaining His names and attributes by giving them meanings other than their obvious meanings.

   b. **Allah must be referred to as He has referred to Himself**

      Allah must be referred to without giving Him any new names or attributes. For example Allah may not be given the name Al-Ghaadib (the Angry One), despite the fact that He has said that He gets angry, because neither Allah nor His messenger have used this name.

   c. **Allah is referred to without giving Him the attributes of His creation**

      In a reference to God, we should strictly abstain from giving Him the attributes of those whom He has created. For instance in the Bible, God is portrayed as repenting for His bad thoughts in the same way as humans do when they realise their errors. This is completely against the principle of Tawheed. God does not commit any mistakes or errors and therefore never needs to repent.

      The key principle when dealing with Allah's attributes is given in the Qur'an in Surah Ash-Shura:

      "There is nothing whatever like unto Him, and He is the One that hears and sees (all things)." [Al-Qur'an 42:11]

      Hearing and seeing are human faculties. However, when attributed to the Divine Being they are without comparison, in their perfection, unlike when associated with humans who require ears, eyes, etc. and who are limited in their sight and hearing in terms of

space, time, capacity, etc.

d. **God's creation should not be given any of His attributes**

To refer to a human with the attribute of God is also against the principle of Tawheed. For example, referring to a person as one who has no beginning or end (eternal).

e. **Allah's name cannot be given to His creatures**

Some Divine names in the indefinite form, like 'Raoof' or 'Raheem' are permissible names for men as Allah has used them for Prophets; but 'Ar-Raoof' (the Most Pious) and Ar-Raheem (the most Merciful) can only be used if prefixed by 'Abd' meaning 'slave of' or 'servant of' i.e. 'Abdur-Raoof' or 'Abdur-Raheem'. Similarly 'Abdur-Rasool' (slave of the Messenger) or 'Abdun-Nabee' (slave of the Prophet) are forbidden.

3. **Tawheed al-Ibaadah (maintaining the unity of worship):**

a. **Definition and meaning of 'Ibadaah':**

'Tawheed al-Ibaadah' means maintaining the unity of worship or 'Ibaadah'. Ibaadah is derived from Arabic word 'Abd' meaning slave or servant. Thus Ibaadah means servitude and worship.

b. **All three categories to be followed simultaneously.**

Only believing in the first two categories of Tawheed without implementing Tawheed-al-Ibaadah is useless. The Qur'an gives the examples of 'Mushrikeens' (idolaters) of the Prophet's time who confirmed the first two aspects of Tawheed. It is mentioned in the Qur'an:

"Say: 'Who is it that sustains you (in life) from the sky and from the earth? Or who is it that Has power over hearing and sight? And who is it that brings out the living from the dead and the dead from the living? And who is it that rules and regulates all affairs?' They will soon say, 'Allah'. Say, 'Will you not then show piety (to Him)?' " [Al-Qur'an 10:31]

A similar example is repeated in Surah Zukhruf of the Glorious Qur'an:

"If thou ask them, Who created them, they will certainly say, 'Allah': how then are they deluded away (from the Truth)?" [Al-Qur'an 43:87]

The pagan Meccans knew that Allah (swt) was their Creator, Sustainer, Lord and Master. Yet they were not Muslims because they also worshipped other gods besides Allah. Allah (swt) categorised them as 'Kuffaar' (disbelievers) and 'Mushrikeen' (idol worshippers and those who associate partners with God).

"And most of them believe not in Allah without associating (others as partners) with Him!" [Al-Qur'an 12:106]

Thus 'Tawheed al-Ibaadah' i.e. maintaining the unity of worship is the most important aspect of Tawheed. Allah (swt) alone deserves worship and He alone can grant benefit to man for his worship.

## Shirk:

**Definition:**

The omission of any of the above mentioned categories of tawheed or deficiency in the fulfillment of any criteria of Tawheed is referred to as 'shirk'.(Please note that the Arabic word 'Shirk' has the same sound as in the English word 'ship' and not as in the English word 'shirk',which means 'to evade'

‘Shirk’ literally means sharing or associating partners. In Islamic terms it means associating partners with Allah and is equivalent to idolatry.

1. **Shirk is the greatest sin that Allah will never forgive:**

   The Qur’an describes the greatest sin in Surah Al-Nisa’:

   "Allah forgives not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgives anything else, to whom He pleases; to set up partners with Allah is to devise a sin most heinous indeed." [Al-Qur’an 4:48]

   The same message is repeated in Surah Al-Nisa’:

   "Allah forgives not (the sin of) joining other gods With Him; but He forgives whom He pleases other sins than this: one who joins other gods with Allah, has strayed far, far away (From the Right)." [Al-Qur’an 4:116]

2. **Shirk leads to hell fire:**

   The Qur’an says in Surah Ma’idah:

   "They do blaspheme who say: ‘Allah is Christ the son of Mary.’ But said Christ: ‘O Children of Israel! Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord’. Whoever joins other gods with Allah – Allah will forbid him the Garden, and the Fire will be his abode. There will for the wrongdoers be no one to help." [Al-Qur’an 5:72]

3. **Worship and Obedience to none but Allah:**

   The Qur’an mentions in Surah Ali-’Imran:

   Say: "O people of the Book! Come To common terms as between us and you, that we worship none but Allah, that we associate no partners with Him, that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than Allah." If then they turn back, say ye: "Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allah’s Will)." [Al-Qur’an 3:64]

   The Glorious Qur’an says:

   "And if all the trees on earth were pens and the Ocean (were ink), with seven Oceans behind it to add to its (supply), yet would not the Words of Allah be exhausted (In the writing): for Allah is Exalted in power, Full of Wisdom." [Al-Qur’an 31:27]

   Our analysis of Concept of God in various Religion shows that monotheism is an integral part of every major religion of the world. However, it is unfortunate that some adherents of these religions violate the teachings of their own scriptures and have set up partners to Almighty God.

   An analysis of the scriptures of various religions, reveals that all scriptures exhort mankind to believe in, and submit to One God. All these scriptures condemn the association of partners to God, or the worship of God in the form of images. The Glorious Qur’an says:

   "O men! Here is a parable set forth! Listen to it! Those on whom, besides Allah, you call, cannot create (even) a fly, if they all met together for the purpose! And if the fly should snatch away anything from them, they would have no power to release it from the fly. Feeble are those who petition and those whom they petition!" [Al-Qur’an 22:73]

   The basis of religion is the acceptance of Divine guidance. A rejection of this guidance has serious implications for society. While we have made great strides in science and technology, true peace still eludes us. All ‘isms’ have failed to provide the much vaunted deliverance.

   The scriptures of all major religions exhort mankind to follow that which is good and eschew that which is evil. All scriptures remind mankind that good will not go unrewarded and evil will

not go unpunished!

The question we need to address is, which of these scriptures provides us with the correct ‘instruction manual’ that we need to regulate our individual and collective lives?

I hope and pray that Allah guides all of us towards the Truth (Aameen)